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**A Bubble of the American Dream:
Experiences of Asian students at key universities in the
midst of racist movements in Progressive-Era California**

Chang Woo Lee

One way of summing up the past two years of the Trump presidency is the fight against immigrants: Trump attempted to end DACA and build a wall along the Mexico border. During his presidency, opportunities for legal immigration and visitation became stricter. California leads the resistance against this rising anti-immigrant sentiment as it strongly associates itself with diversity and immigration. Yet, California during the Progressive Era was a hotbed for extreme racism. An influx of Asians, principally Chinese and Japanese, met a hostile reception. Growing anti-Asian sentiment resulted in the exclusion of future Chinese and Japanese immigrants in addition to segregation and restrictions on existing immigrants. Facing strong anti-Asian sentiment, early Japanese and Chinese immigrants endured racism and violence. However, Japanese and Chinese students who entered California universities did not experience overt violence and discrimination. Between 1890 and 1920, Asian students at Berkeley and Stanford not only faced significantly less prejudice and racism, they also enjoyed many academic opportunities comparable to those available to their fellow white students. Their perceived identity as visiting foreigners, rather than aspiring citizens, and their interactions with the American upper class made them less threatening to the California public. However, even these “Model Asians” ultimately found that their privileged status offered only a veneer of protection against the fundamentally oppressive nature of racism.

Experiences of Asian college students during this era are rare in comparison to the studies on the experiences of younger Asian students and laborers. The most comprehensive books on Asian students in college during this era are *Race, Religion, and Civil*

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Rights: Asian Students on the West Coast, 1900-1968 by Stephanie Hinnershitz and *Seeking Modernity in China's Name: Chinese Students in the United States, 1900-1927* by Weili Ye. Hinnershitz provides a detailed account of the structural discrimination these students experienced, but does not cover the full range of their experiences. Ye covers the full range of Chinese students' experiences in American universities, but only focuses on Chinese students studying on the East Coast. By analyzing life experiences of Japanese and Chinese students at Stanford and Berkeley during the Progressive Era, this paper provides a more comprehensive case study of these students and reveals a deeper understanding of the complexities of the anti-Asian movements.

"Asian American," now common terminology, did not exist during the Progressive Era, and the experiences of the Chinese and Japanese at large differed. The Japanese students experienced better treatment than the Chinese largely due to the rise of the former nation's international status, especially after the Russo-Japanese War. The clearest example is the federal government's efforts to block anti-Japanese legislation. When the San Francisco Board of Education tried to ban Japanese students from the public schools, President Theodore Roosevelt blocked the measure, largely in order to maintain a good diplomatic relationship with Japan.¹ In contrast, Chinese students were forced into segregated schools.² However, everyday violence and discrimination in the city experienced by Japanese and Chinese did not differ significantly. By the early-1900s, the anti-Japanese movement combined with the already existing anti-Chinese movement to

¹ Roger Daniels, *Asian America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 125; "Governor Transmits President's Telegram," *San Francisco Call*, 13 March 1907; Yamamoto Ichihashi, *Japanese Imagination It's Status in California* (San Francisco: The Marshall Press, 1915), 230, 244; Meyer Weinberg, *Asian-American Education* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997) 52; "Would Force Japanese into Common Schools," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 18 January 1907.

² *Ibid.*, 120; *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 February 1905, in Carey McWilliams, *Prejudice: Japanese-Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance* (Hamden: The Shoe String Press: 1971), 18; Weinberg, *Asian-American Education*, 19.

create an anti-Asiatic movement. Significantly, Chinese and Japanese students at Stanford and Berkeley experienced a relative lack of discrimination and violence.

By all measures, strong anti-Asian sentiment prevailed in California throughout the Progressive Era, and both Chinese and Japanese had to endure severe violence and legal restrictions. They were subjected to racial slurs, verbal attacks, beatings, and occasional lynching and massacres. Discrimination was also embedded in the law. Chinese were forced to reside and conduct their business in a very restricted area, and the Japanese faced similar confinement, though to a lesser degree. Moreover, both Japanese and Chinese faced many difficulties in their access to public schools. For many white people, allowing Asian pupils to study in public schools meant the ultimate form of assimilation and permanent residency for Asians in California. Arguing for Japanese student segregation from the public school, *San Francisco Call* stated plainly, “we are not willing that our children should meet Asiatics in intimate association... That is ‘race prejudice’ and we stand by it.”³

Anti-Asian sentiment and violence were not only experiences exclusive to poor Asian laborers but also were felt acutely by many Asian students in California. This was especially true for Chinese students during their travels and entrance to the U.S.⁴ As soon as the steamer carrying Fu Chi-Hao, a Chinese student, docked on American soil, trouble began. He faced mistreatment despite having the necessary legal documents. The immigration officers examined his documents for the smallest errors and sent him to a horrendous detention jail, in which many Chinese stayed for weeks or months, without due process, representation, or promise of

³ *San Francisco Call*, OCT. 26, 1906, in Charles Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), in Don T. Nakanishi and Tina Yamano Nishida, *The Asian American Educational Experience* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 17.

⁴Ng Poon Chew, “The Treatment of the Exempt Classes of Chinese in the U.S.,” in Judy Young, Gordon H. Chang, and Him Mark Lai, *Chinese American Voices* (California: University of California Press, 2006), 109-117; “Wither’s Certificates- Collector Hager Rejects a Chinese Student,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 March 1886.

eventual release.⁵ Although Japanese students were relatively free from harsh treatment in the immigration process, they were not free from the everyday violence against Asians. According to Nisuke Mitsumori:

It was March or April of 1905 when I landed in San Francisco... There was a gang of scoundrels who came to treat the immigrants roughly as soon as they heard that some Japanese had docked... There were a group of fifteen to twenty youngsters who shouted, 'Let's go! The Japs have come!' We rushed to the inn to avoid being hit. As we went along, we were bombarded with abuses such as 'Japs,' 'lewd,' etcetera. They even picked horse dung off the street and threw it at us. I was baptized with horse dung. This was my very first impression of America.⁶

When they entered the universities after overcoming these initial violent experiences, Japanese and Chinese students still faced racism, though in a much lesser degree compared to the common practice in California. David Starr Jordan, the first Stanford president, was accused of segregation practices in Stanford dormitories, in which all the students of color were quartered in the basement and denied access to the much more nicely furnished upper stories where faculty and white students were quartered.⁷ In 1909, a Japanese student was attacked at the Berkeley campus by a handful of white students in a racially motivated attack.⁸ Moreover, the campus social experience of these students and the level of integration reveals subtle but pervasive differences. Both Stanford and Berkeley yearbooks show

⁵ "My Reception in America," Carton 22, Folder 2, Him Mark Lai Papers, Ethnic Library, Berkeley, CA - original document was written by Fu Chi Hao and published by *The Outlook*, 10 Aug. 1907.

⁶ Eileen Sunada Sarasohn, *The Issei Portrait of a Pioneer* (Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1983), 59.

⁷ "Anti-Japanese Order Issued by Jordan," *San Francisco Call*, 22 January 1907.

⁸ "Japanese Boy Assaulted on College Campus," *San Francisco Call*, 31 January 1909.

the lack of Japanese and Chinese students' involvement in campus activities besides having their own clubs.⁹ It is difficult to know whether this was due to the cultural difference and their relatively



poor English skills or proof of a subtle form of discrimination. Picture of members of Mechanical Engineering Association at Stanford. The Stanford Quad, 1908.¹⁰

(F. Nakayama is the right bottom row. He was one of the very few Japanese students at Stanford whose name and photo could be found outside the Japanese Students Club page in the Stanford yearbooks. The vast majority of student clubs and fraternities consisted of all white male students.)

Nevertheless, this discrimination on campus seems less significant compared to the vast freedom and opportunities Asian students received at these top two California universities. Indeed, Asian students were comparably well received and accepted.¹¹ Despite California public schools segregating their students, Japanese and Chinese students at Stanford and Berkeley studied

⁹ The Stanford Quad, 1890-1913, Green Library, Palo Alto, CA; Blue and Gold, 1890-1910, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA.

¹⁰ The Stanford Quad, 1908, 240-41.

¹¹ Weili Ye, *Seeking Modernity in China's Name: Chinese Students in the United States, 1900-1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 92.

alongside white students.¹² Newspapers often regarded university commencement ceremonies as unique social scenes as they featured Caucasians and Asians together.¹³ At Stanford, Japanese students formed a Japanese Student Club, which gained public support from the first university president David Starr Jordan, and also received help to build their own clubhouse.¹⁴ There was also a growing interest in Asian cultures among the college population, and Japanese students and their club at Stanford worked as cultural ambassadors, hosting events like a Japanese tea and teaching martial arts such as Jiu Jitsu.¹⁵ Chinese students at Berkeley established Chinese American Students Club (Cathay Club) in order to “further the understanding between Chinese and American students of the university and included both Chinese and American students in their club leaderships.”¹⁶ Like Japanese students at Stanford, they also featured cultural events like Chinese plays and costume displays.¹⁷

¹² *The First Japanese Baseball Team*, Unknown, 1907, Box 4, File 8, Myron C Burr Papers, Stanford Library, Palo Alto, CA.

¹³ “Praise Is Given to Fong Sec,” *San Francisco Call*, 19 May 1905.

¹⁴ Scrapbook, 1916-32, Japanese Student Association, Box 1, File 4, Stanford Library, Palo Alto, CA.

¹⁵ “Japanese Members Entertain Club,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 30 October 1908; “Japanese Tea,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 03 February 1903; “Successful ‘Jinks’ in Encina,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 25 March 1907; “Japanese Tea Party,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 09 February 1903; “Japanese Students Entertain,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 05 November 1908; “Will Teach Wrestling,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 03 February 1903; “To Teach Jiu Jitsu,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 05 September 1905.

¹⁶ “Chinese-American Club Is Organized,” *The Daily Californian*, 31 October 1910, Doe Library, Berkeley, CA.

¹⁷ “Cathay Club Discusses Chinese Social Manner,” *The Daily Californian*, 14 February 1911, Doe Library, Berkeley, CA; “Cathay Club Plans to Produce Chinese Play,” *The Daily Californian*, Doe Library, Berkeley, CA.

“Japanese American Students with David Starr Jordan.” Toichi Domoto Papers.¹⁸



Japanese and Chinese students also proved themselves to be highly intelligent by winning competitive scholarships and presidential debates, by participating in Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), and achieving competitive memberships like Phi Beta Kappa and other prestigious attainments.¹⁹ Some were chosen

¹⁸ Jordan is the white gentleman who sits on the center right. Japanese American Students with David Starr Jordan, Box 1, File 6, Toichi Domoto Papers, Stanford Library, Palo Alto, CA.

¹⁹“Japanese Student Wins Harvard Scholarship,” *San Francisco Call*, 26 August 1904; “Scholarship Battle Is Not Yet Won,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 March 1906; “Japanese at Stanford Wins Bonnheim Prize,” *San Francisco Call*, 22 December 1907; “Representatives to Conference,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 20 September 1906; “Prominent Japanese Student Is Successful in Ethical Discussion,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 07 January 1908; “By Hard Work,” *San Francisco Call*, 03 October 1894; “Chee Su Lowe Now A Private,” *San Francisco Call*, 05 May 1906; “Coast News Note,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 25 February 1898; “Scholars Are Chosen,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 09 April 1907.

to partake in the editing of the school yearbook.²⁰ Others upon graduation went so far as to receive professorships at both Stanford and Berkeley to research and teach Asian languages and histories.²¹ Their success stories were all clearly documented in student newspapers in a matter-of-fact tone without signs of prejudice or resentment, and Chinese and Japanese class members were mostly referred to as fellow students or friends.²² This feeling of friendship and acceptance encouraged some members of the universities to launch pro-Asian campaigns. For instance, Chinese students hosted and played a baseball game at Berkeley to raise funds to provide China with famine relief.²³ Some students and faculty, most presumably white, even launched a donation campaign to build a hostel for a Japanese college in Kyoto to support Japanese students attending the institution to establish greater friendship with students in Japan.²⁴ Although the campaign received opposition and skepticism on campus and they collected minimal funds, it proves the inviting and accepting atmosphere Berkeley had toward Asian students.²⁵ Even the opposition voice to the campaign stated their primary reason for objection was that the donation would be made as a gift from Berkeley to the Japanese college as opposed to from private donors.”²⁶

²⁰ “Chinese Youth as Sub-Editor,” *San Francisco Call*, 13 April 1905.

²¹ “Japanese Becomes Stanford Teacher,” *San Francisco Call*, 03 June 1908; “Japanese Student Is Given Important Post,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 28 May 1904; “Realize the Importance of Oriental Languages,” *San Francisco Call*, 20 August 1900.

²² *The Daily Palo Alto*, 20 March 1894; “Native Chinese Son Graduated with High Honors at the University of California,” *Press Democrat*, 24 May 1907.

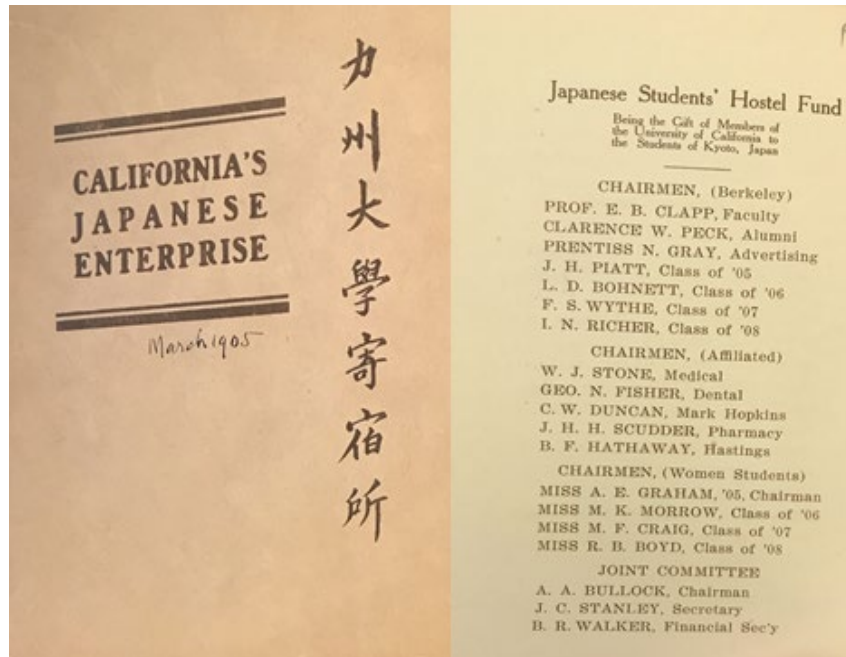
²³ “Chinese Students Will Play Baseball Tomorrow,” *The Daily Californian*, 24 February 1911.

²⁴ “Opportunity for Japanese to Be Erected in Kyoto,” *The Daily Californian*, 10 March 1905; California’s Japanese Student Enterprise, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA.

²⁵ “Japanese Hostel Notice,” *The Daily Californian*, 2 February 1906.

²⁶ “Not an Official Enterprise,” *The Daily Californian*, 21 March 1905.

“California’s Japanese Student Enterprise,” Bancroft Library, Berkeley.²⁷



What enabled these students to enjoy much broader opportunities with less discrimination? First, their international student status played a significant role. This status was understood clearly by their home countries, their host country, and themselves. Some Japanese students coming to California were poor student-laborers while others were sponsored by the Japanese government.²⁸ Either way, their primary goal was not to stay in the U.S. but to learn English and Western technologies in order to have a successful career upon returning to Japan.²⁹ Many Chinese students also pursued higher education in the U.S. through their government’s sponsorship. The Chinese government created a

²⁷ This brochure was published and distributed at the Berkeley campus to fundraise the money.

²⁸ “Foreigners in College,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 25 February 1908; Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 7-11.

²⁹ Yamamoto Ichihashi, *Japanese in the United States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1932), 67.

scholarship program to send students to the U.S. specifically to expedite modernization and dictated that 80% of these students study science.³⁰ These students on scholarship showed a strong commitment to “western learning” and hoped this would enable them to lead the modernization of China. Both Chinese and Japanese students’ journals showed their strong nationalism and patriotism toward their home countries.

Assumptions of their temporary visiting status were visible in both Chinese and Japanese students’ journals. Many writings featured in *The Berkeley Lyceum*, a Japanese students’ journal, stressed the mutual benefits of the good relationship between Japan and the U.S. with a tone that indicates the assumption of future leadership and representation for their country.³¹ Similarly, *The World’s Chinese Students’ Journal* specifically states, “By educating and preparing in her (U.S.) schools of learning the future rulers of the rising Empire, much of the misunderstanding in the future relationship between America and China will be eliminated...”³² In fact, Chinese students associations in the U.S. aligned themselves to a larger World Chinese Student Federation in Shanghai.³³

This international identity of Japanese and Chinese students was understood clearly by the U.S. government and its intellectuals. As the U.S. sought to expand its influence in Asia, it actively recruited Asian youths to study in the U.S. American intellectuals supported the Chinese government to create a scholarship program to United States universities. Their hope was

³⁰ The Daily Californian, 04 March 1909, Doe Library, Berkeley, CA; Stacey Bieler, “Patriot” or “Traitor?” *A History of American-Educated Chinese Students* (Armonk: An East Gate Book, 2004), 48.

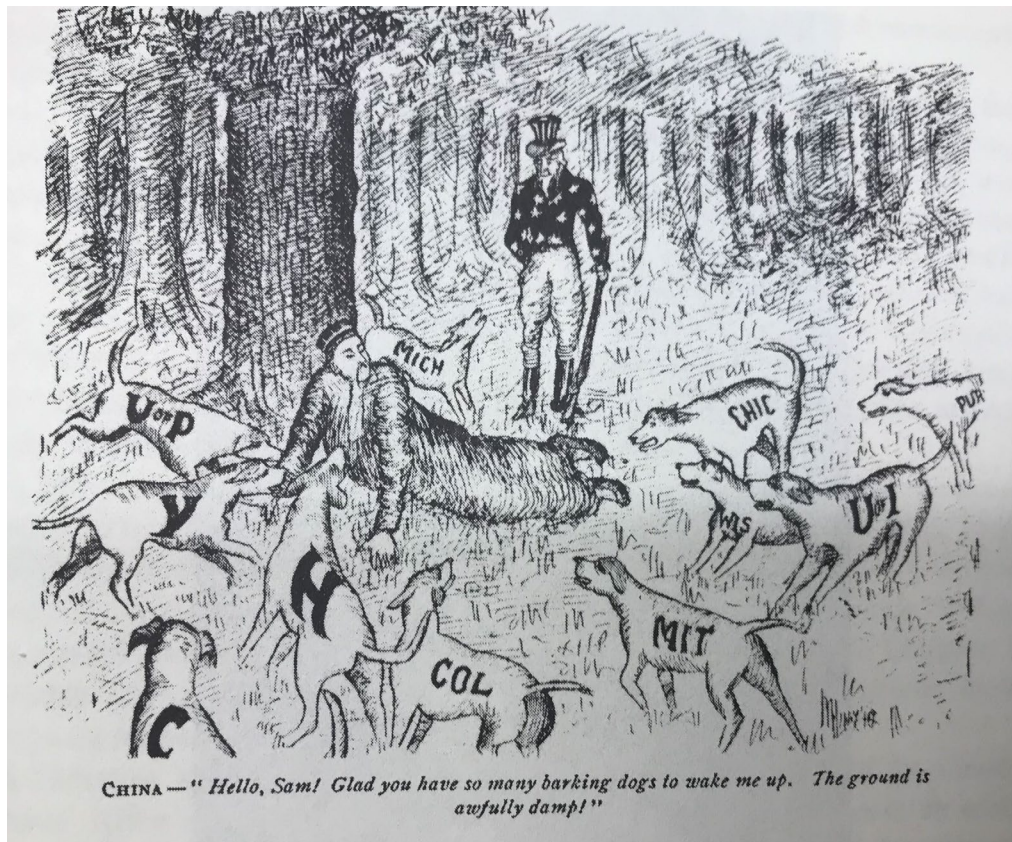
³¹ Berkeley Lyceum. 1911, 45, v.4, The Berkeley Lyceum, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA.

³² *Pacific Coast Chinese Students Association, Berkeley Constitution 1905 and Letter to President Roosevelt, 1906, Concerning Chinese Exclusion Law, 1906*, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA; “America’s Friendly Offer to China,” *The World’s Chinese Students’ Journal*, 2 July 1906, 4.

³³ Chinese Student’s Alliance of Hawaii Records, 1906-1911, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA.

that Chinese students would improve the image of the U.S. in their home countries upon their return. The federal government's active effort to recruit Asian students was made plain in *Admission of Chinese Students to American Colleges* published by the U.S. Bureau of Education in 1909. It responded to strong demands by U.S. diplomats in China and provided students in China with a guideline to navigate their entrance process to American universities. The book provided a comprehensive guide to American higher education structures, academic requirements, major courses and their substitutions, and the special admission processes major U.S. universities provided to Chinese students.³⁴

“Uncle Sam’s barking dogs waking up China,” *Chinese Students’ Monthly*, February 1910.³⁵



³⁴ John Fryer, *Admission of Chinese Students to American Colleges* (Washington D.C.: Washington Government Printing Office, 1909), Green Library, Palo Alto, CA.

³⁵ Bieler, 45.

Consequently, many intellectuals were keenly aware that the U.S. universities functioned as potential diplomatic relationship building sites for the U.S. and Asian nations. David Starr Jordan, the first president of Stanford, was fond of Japan and invited prominent Japanese leaders, promoted cultural exchanges, and publicly supported Japanese students and their achievements.³⁶ Benjamin Wheeler, Berkeley's president, wrote a cordial statement for *The Berkeley Lyceum* in which he put Japan and the U.S. on equal footing by demanding that the citizens of both countries learn from each other.³⁷ In fact, multiple volumes of the *Lyceum* featured endorsements not only from high ranking Berkeley professors but also from prominent men such as other university presidents, reverends, and even William Jennings Bryan, a respected Democratic politician soon to be Secretary of State.³⁸ Jordan also founded the Oriental History Department at Stanford, and Wheeler founded the Oriental Language and Literature Department at Berkeley. Both hired graduating Asian students to teach classes.³⁹

Their temporary visiting status was also clear in the types of employment available to these students. Many Japanese students without government sponsorship worked while they were going to college to cover their expenses, and one of the readily available employment opportunities was as "schoolboy."⁴⁰ Schoolboys were hired by middle and upper class white families to help with chores including dishwashing, cleaning, preparing meals, and so on. They usually worked in the morning and evening and were excused from

³⁶ "Waseda Team Sails Soon," *The Daily Palo Alto*, 29 March 1905; Ichihashi, *Japanese Imagination It's Status in California*.

³⁷ Benjamin Ide Wheeler to The Berkeley Lyceum, Unknown. 1907, 2, v.1, The Berkeley Lyceum, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA.

³⁸ William J. Bryan to The Berkeley Lyceum, Unknown, 1911, 4, v.5, The Berkeley Lyceum, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA.

³⁹ "Japanese Student Is Given Important Post," *Los Angeles Herald*, 28 May 1904; "Realize the Importance of Oriental Languages," *San Francisco Call*, 20 August 1900.

⁴⁰ Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 22-28.

9 to 5 so that they could go to school. In exchange for their services, these students received a room and meal at their place of work and also a small sum of money to cover their basic expenses. In places like San Francisco, Palo Alto, and Berkeley, employing Japanese schoolboy was not an uncommon practice.⁴¹ This schoolboy employment was nevertheless a challenge for both parties as most American norms and cultures were completely foreign to these students. Some white families held their racial prejudice toward Japanese students although many others were friendly and kind to these students. The weekly salary of a dollar or two was not enough to cover tuition for college. Running out of money, some of these poor students looked for more promising employment opportunities only to find such opportunities unavailable.⁴² These limited types and availability of employment suggest that Asian students had to conform to their international student identity.

Asian students in American higher education were understood by both Asian and U.S. governments as a key to bridging two different worlds. For China and Japan, American-educated nationals were future leaders. For the U.S., they were model Asians who served to quell the anti-Asian sentiments and establish a stronger American influence in Asia. Accordingly, governments, students, and the upper society of both America and Asian countries all shared the assumption that these students would return to their countries. Herbert Johnson writes in the *Lyceum*:

It is not likely that a large percentage of the student class will desire to remain permanently in this country. But while they are students they can reveal the best side of Japanese life to the American with whom they come in contact, and they can greatly influence their countrymen who reside here. They

⁴¹L. E. Harter "Student Employment Bureau," *The Daily Palo Alto*, 04 December 1902.

⁴² Yoshio Markino, "My Experiences in San Francisco," *McClure's Magazine* (1893-1926), Nov 1910, VOL. XXXVI, No. I, American Periodicals, 107.

must forever set themselves against everything which may appear like the establishment of Japanese colonies here.⁴³ Their efforts bore fruits. Many of these students returned to their countries and held important government and educational positions.⁴⁴

However, what improved and protected the experiences of Japanese and Chinese students in California Universities even more than their foreign visiting status was their upper-middle-class status. In fact, none of the main reasons anti-Asian forces used to justify violence and exclusion were applicable to Asian students. Anti-Asian groups argued for the exclusion based upon the impossibility of assimilation of Asians to America, their filthiness and lack of morals, and, paradoxically, their industrious characteristics that were unfair to American laborers.⁴⁵ White workers, politicians, and newspapers were the driving force behind anti-Asian movements, which almost exclusively focused on “Asian coolies.”⁴⁶ Therefore, all Japanese and Chinese exclusion laws between 1880 and 1910 specifically focused on poor Asian laborers, but allowed exempted classes like merchants and

⁴³ Herbert B. Johnson, “Opportunities of Japanese Students in America,” Berkeley Lyceum. 1911, 46, v.4, The Berkeley Lyceum, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA.

⁴⁴ “Japanese Student Honored,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 08 September 1903; “First Japanese Graduate Is Hurt,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 21 October 1908; “Alumni in Asia,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 29 March 1900; “Chinese Educated Here Back to Buy Machinery,” *San Francisco Call*, 27 February 1909; “Japanese Student Summoned Home,” *San Francisco Call*, 07 March 1904; “Chinese Student Goes Home to Teach,” *Colusa Daily Sun*, 31 July 1903; “Chinese Student Winning Renown,” *San Francisco Call*, 06 August 1906; “Japanese Student to Direct Normal,” *The Daily Palo Alto*, 25 October 1906; “Chinese Students Win Honors and Depart Today,” *San Francisco Call*, 24 May 1907; T. H. Lee to President W.C.S.F, 5 Mar. 1912, Chinese Student’s Alliance of Hawaii Records, 1906-1911, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA.

⁴⁵ John H. Boalt, “The Chinese Question,” Aug. 1877, *The Chinese Question. A Paper Read Before the Berkeley Club*, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA; McWilliams, *Prejudice: Japanese Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance*, 17.

⁴⁶ K. Kawasaki, “The Japanese Question,” Berkeley Lyceum, 1907, 23, v.1, The Berkeley Lyceum, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA; Roger Daniels, *Asian America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press: 1988), 47.

students.⁴⁷ Even those who favored the exclusion of Chinese coolies still supported “greater freedom in the admission of the Chinese students and merchant classes.”⁴⁸

Moreover, both Japanese and Chinese intellectuals and governments went alongside this class divide. The Japanese government was deeply interested in maintaining a positive national image and worried that the influx of poor Japanese laborers might ruin the image of Japan’s international image.⁴⁹ Many Japanese students came from the Samurai class, a Japanese upper class, and felt uncomfortable aligning themselves with poor Japanese laborers. Many Chinese intellectuals also differentiated students and laborers. According to Ng Poon Chew, the editor of the Chinese newspaper in San Francisco, Theodore Roosevelt once promised him “all Chinese laborers and coolies should be excluded, but that all Chinese of other classes should be welcomed.”⁵⁰ He used this remark to support better treatments of Chinese students. In the meantime, the usage of the quote also displayed his indifferent attitude toward Chinese laborers. As the public’s anger and violence toward Asians intensified in the 1910s and 20s, there was a growing sense of appreciation of

Picture of Members of Cosmopolitan Club at Stanford with David Starr Jordan. The Stanford Quad, 1912.

⁴⁷ *Annual Report of the United States Commissioner-General of Immigration*, 1908, 125-26, in Ichihashi, *Japanese Imagination It’s Status in California*, 62; “To Keep Out the Chinese,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 December 1901.

⁴⁸ “Denby Tells of the Boycott,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 18 April 1906; “Chinese Coolies Should Be Excluded,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 December 1905.

⁴⁹ Ronald Takaki, *Spacious Dreams: The First Wave of Asian Immigration* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1994), 63-65.

⁵⁰ “Are Bitter on Exclusion Law,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 22 March 1908.



multicultural experiences among educated people, which gave birth to a cosmopolitan movement. In many universities in the U.S., the Cosmopolitan movement gave Asian students distinct places where they could enjoy wielding strong influence and leadership. In Stanford yearbooks, the Cosmopolitan club consisted of multi-racial groups, including many Asian students, and the club's first meeting stated that its "purpose [was] to learn the customs, viewpoints, and characteristics of different nations, to remove national prejudice and to establish international friendships."⁵¹ Significantly, higher education was mostly for middle and upper-class whites. Only about 2.3% of the 18 to 24-year-old population enrolled in higher institutions.⁵² Therefore,

⁵¹ Articles, Reviews, and Talks by Ichihashi, Box 2, Folder 5 (2-5), Ichihashi papers (SC0071), Stanford Library, Palo Alto, CA; Stephanie Hinnertshitz, *Race, Religion, and Civil Rights: Asian Students on the West Coast, 1900-1968* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 19-26; The Stanford Quad, 1912, 128.

⁵² National Center for Education Statistics, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, by Thomas D. Snyder, 1993, 76.

although Asian students faced perceived racial inferiority, their superior social class compensated for this.

Their aspiration to join upper class society and the promise of returning to their home countries gave these students temporary protection against the prevailing overt racial discrimination in California. Consequently, if either one of these two requirements—upper-middle class interactions and foreign visiting status—was violated, Asian students quickly found themselves subject to racism. This was especially true if they decided to stay in the United States after graduation. For instance, Asian students who married white women faced difficulties finding ministers willing to certify their marriages.⁵³ William Ngong Fong, a Chinese graduate of Stanford and later the first Chinese professor in Berkeley, lost a libel suit against Goldberg, Bowen & Co. for its racist depiction of his marriage to a white woman.⁵⁴ Even the most prominent Chinese and Japanese scholars in the U.S. found their lives increasingly strained after graduation. Yoshi Kuno, the first Japanese professor at Berkeley, who taught there for over thirty years, was still unable to purchase land because of the Alien Land Acts of 1913 and 1920. Even his connections to high state politicians including California's Attorney General did not help.⁵⁵ Moreover, the right to naturalization was not granted to all Asian immigrants until the late 1940s to 1950s, and neither Fong nor Kuno lived long enough to exercise that right.

The story of Yamato Ichihashi is even more tragic. A member of Phi Beta Kappa and a professor at Stanford, Ichihashi was probably the most prominent Japanese scholar in the United States.⁵⁶ He spent decades demystifying anti-Japanese narratives and promoting a better relationship between Japan and the U.S.

⁵³ "Japanese Graduate of Stanford," *Press Democrat*, 15 July 1910.

⁵⁴ "Little in Damages for Ngong Fong," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 June 1898; "Lin Shien Yu a Happy Groom," *San Francisco Call*, 5 June 1906.

⁵⁵ U.S. Webb to Yoshi Kuno, 16 Mar. 1916 and 27 Sep. 1928, Carton 1, File California, Attorney General's Office, Yoshi Saburo Kuno Papers, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA

⁵⁶ "Japanese Elected to Scholarship Society," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 10 November 1908.

only to find himself being forcefully relocated to an internment camp at Tule Lake during World War II. The bitter irony was that Ichihashi found the director of the camp he was incarcerated in to be one of his former students at Stanford. “The Emperor of Tulelake,” was how Ichihashi was often described.⁵⁷ At the end of the day, even with all the fame and honor he received from the American upper class, he was only a “king” of the inferior race. Ichihashi survived until 1963, long after the passage of McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 that enabled Japanese immigrants to receive citizenship, but he never naturalized.⁵⁸

The life of Ichihashi shows the existence of nuances in anti-Asian racism in California during the Progressive Era. Contrary to the popular understanding of this era in California as a simple anti-Asian state, these Japanese and Chinese students’ experience in California universities shed light to the fact that anti-Asian racism in the West was much more nuanced and complex. No matter how racist the American upper class was in their personal beliefs, their intellectual and business interests in Asia ensured a relatively safe space for Japanese and Chinese students. Although access to this space remained closely guarded and limited to a small portion of Asians, it still provided educational opportunities for Asian students in the United States. Therefore, when upper-class Americans lost their rationale for supporting Japan after Pearl Harbor, the nuanced racism was quickly replaced by full-blown indiscriminate racism against all Japanese when Executive Order 9066 relocated all persons of Japanese ancestry to the internment camps, including students and scholars like Ichihashi.

The outcome of nuanced racism from the Progressive Era was the creation of model Asians. Westernized and educated, these early Asian students were the models to which all Asians needed to aspire in the eyes of the westerners. By accepting this role, Asian

⁵⁷ “‘The Emperor of Tulelake’ Japanese Professor (Formerly of Stanford) Wields Great Power Inside the Camp,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 May 1943.

⁵⁸ Gordon H. Chang, *Morning Glory, Evening Shadow* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 455.

students received relative freedom and opportunity in California universities. However, no matter how much they excelled, they were still the top of the inferior race. In the 21st century California Bay Area, the Asian American experiences completed flip-flopped compared to a century ago. At both Stanford and Berkeley, students with Asian ancestry are highly successful and now vastly overrepresented compared to the proportion of the Asian population to the state and national populations.⁵⁹ Not only do Asian Americans have more equal opportunities, but they are also becoming exceedingly successful. All these changes seem to suggest that Asian Americans have finally become accepted to the society. However, facing a new surge of racism that has intensified under the Trump administration and the continuing stereotype of Asians as the “Model Minority,” many aspiring Asian American students could find valuable lessons from the stories of the earlier generation. Without achieving complete social justice, even a model minority will always remain an inferior race.

⁵⁹ “All Undergraduates, Fall 2018,” *Stanford Facts 2019*, (12 Feb. 2019); “UC Berkeley Fall Total Enrollment by Level, Gender, and Ethnicity,” *Berkeley Office of Planning and Analysis*, 18 Oct. 2018, (12 Feb. 2019).